
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)

The NLSY97 is the newest survey in the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) program. The survey documents the transition from school to work and is designed to be representative of people living in the United States in 1997 who were born during the years 1980 through 1984. Thus, many of the oldest youths (age 16 as of December 31, 1996) were still in school at the time of the first survey, and the youngest respondents (age 12) had not yet entered the labor market. The NLSY97 cohort includes 8,984 individuals.

Through the NLSY97, researchers will be able to identify characteristics defining the transition that today's youths make from school to the labor market and into adulthood. To achieve this goal, the NLSY97 collects extensive information on youths' labor market behavior and educational experiences. Data on their family and community backgrounds are included in the survey, and in round 1 information was collected from one of the youth's parents. Youths also took the computer adaptive form of the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (CAT-ASVAB)*, which measures knowledge and skills in multiple areas including reading and mathematics. Information has also been gathered from high schools in the sample areas where the respondents live, and transcripts are gathered as the youths leave high school. This information will help researchers assess the impact of schooling and other environmental factors on these newest labor market entrants. Data from the NLSY97 will also aid in determining how youth experiences relate to establishing a career, participating in government programs, and forming a family. Over time, information from the NLSY97 will allow researchers to compare the progress of this cohort to that of the earlier NLS cohorts.

This detailed guide is designed for researchers who are either working or planning to work with the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). Users who are interested in a general overview of the NLS surveys should refer to the *NLS Handbook*. Users may also wish to read recent issues of *NLS News*, a quarterly newsletter, available on-line at <www.bls.gov/nls/nlsnews.htm>. For those not familiar with the NLS, a brief overview of the NLSY97 and the other NLS cohorts follows.

1.2 The NLS

The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) are a set of surveys sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor. These surveys have gathered information at multiple points in time on the labor market experiences of diverse groups of men and women. Each of the NLS samples consists of several thousand individuals, some of whom have been surveyed over several decades. The earliest NLS interviews began in 1966 under the original sponsorship of the Office of Manpower, Automation, and Training (now the Employment and Training Administration). These cohorts were chosen in an effort to understand specific issues pertaining to the U.S. labor market, such as retirement, the return of housewives

to the labor force, and the school-to-work transition. Since that time, however, the surveys have been expanded to provide useful information on an extremely broad range of topics.

The first four cohorts (Older Men, Mature Women, Young Men, and Young Women) were selected in the mid-1960s because each faced important labor market decisions that were of special concern to policy makers. Each of these cohorts contained an oversample of black Americans. Although the initial plan called for only a 5-year period of interviewing, high retention rates and widespread research interest led investigators to continue the surveys. In 1977, a survey of all known NLS data users and the recommendations of a panel of experts convened by the Department of Labor resulted in two decisions. The first was to continue the surveys of the four Original Cohorts for at least an additional five years (as long as attrition did not become a problem). The second decision was to begin a new longitudinal study of a panel of young men and young women.

This new study was initiated to permit a replication of the analysis of the 1960s Young Men and Young Women cohorts and to assist in the evaluation of the expanded employment and training programs for youth legislated by the 1977 amendments to the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). To these ends, in 1978 a national probability sample was drawn of young women and young men living in the United States and born between January 1, 1957, and December 31, 1964. This sample included an overrepresentation of blacks, Hispanics, and economically disadvantaged non-black/non-Hispanics. With funding from the U.S. Department of Defense and the Armed Services, an additional group of young persons serving in the military was selected for interviewing. This sample of civilian and military youth, called the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79), was first interviewed in 1979 and has been re-interviewed regularly since that date.

The Children of the NLSY79 survey, begun in 1986, further enhanced the NLS. With funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and a number of additional government agencies and organizations, detailed information on the development of children born to NLSY79 women has supplemented the data on mothers and children collected during the regular youth surveys. During these biennial surveys, a battery of child cognitive, socio-emotional, and physiological assessments has been administered to NLSY79 mothers and their children. In addition to these assessments, the Children of the NLSY79 are also asked a number of questions in an interview setting. Beginning in 1994, children age 15 and older, the “Young Adults,” replied to a separate survey with questions similar to those asked of their mothers.

With the aging of the NLSY79 cohort, another longitudinal cohort has been started. The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) collects information on the circumstances that influence or are influenced by the labor market behaviors of youth ages 12–16 as of December 31, 1996. Data on the

youth's educational experiences, along with his or her family and community backgrounds, are also included in the survey. Documenting the transition from school to work, this survey is designed to be representative of the U.S. population in 1997 born during the period 1980 to 1984.

Information on sample sizes, interview years, and the current survey status of each NLS respondent group is presented in Table 1 below.

1.2 Table 1. The NLS: Survey Groups, Sample Sizes, Interview Years & Status

Survey Group	Age Cohort	Birth Year Cohort	Initial Sample Size	Initial/Latest Survey Year	# of Surveys to Date	Survey Status
Older Men	45–59 (as of 3/31/66)	4/1/06–3/31/21	5020	1966/1990	13 ¹	Ended
Mature Women	30–44 (as of 3/31/67)	4/1/22–3/31/37	5083	1967/2001	20	Continuing
Young Men	14–24 (as of 3/31/66)	4/1/41–3/31/52	5225	1966/1981	12	Ended
Young Women	14–24 (as of 12/31/67)	1/1/43–12/31/53	5159	1968/2001	21	Continuing
NLSY79	14–21 (as of 12/31/78)	1957–1964	12686	1979/2000	19	Continuing
NLSY79 Children	Birth–14	—	³	1986/2000	8	Continuing
NLSY79 Young Adults ²	15 & older	—	³	1994/2000	4	Continuing
NLSY97	12–16 (as of 12/31/96)	1980–1984	8984	1997/2001	4	Continuing

¹ Twelve interviews occurred from 1966–83. The 1990 interview surveyed living respondents and next-of-kin of deceased respondents.

² NLSY79 Young Adult respondents were initially interviewed as part of the NLSY79 Children sample. Beginning in 1994, those 15 and older were surveyed separately. In 1998, youths age 21 and older were not interviewed.

³ The sizes of the NLSY79 Children and Young Adult samples are dependent on the number of children born to NLSY79 respondents. Since this number is still increasing, original sample sizes are omitted.

As the table indicates, four rounds of the NLSY97 have been completed (the fifth began in late 2001). Since only four rounds of data are available to the public, this guide discusses only those rounds. Information on the content of the round 5 survey is available in the current *NLS Handbook*. A new edition of this guide will be published when round 5 data processing is complete.

Administration of the NLS: Responsibility for the administration of the NLS resides with the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor. Established in 1884, BLS is responsible for the analysis and publication of data series on employment and unemployment, prices and living conditions, compensation and working conditions, productivity, occupational safety and health, and economic growth and employment projections. Its mission is to promote development of the U.S. labor force by gathering information about the labor force and disseminating it to policy makers and the public so that participants in those markets can make more informed, and thus more efficient, choices.

The NLS program supports BLS in this mission. The surveys are part of a longitudinal research program that includes in-house analyses, extramural grants, and other special projects. The NLS program is housed within the Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics at BLS.

BLS contracts with the Center for Human Resource Research (CHRR) at The Ohio State University to manage the NLS Original Cohorts and the NLSY79 survey, to share in the design of the survey instruments, to disseminate the data, and to provide user services. The Census Bureau collects data for the Original Cohorts through an interagency agreement with BLS. Data collection for the NLSY79 and NLSY79 Children samples is subcontracted to the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. BLS contracts with NORC to manage the NLSY97 cohort and to collect the data for this survey; CHRR is subcontracted for data dissemination, documentation, and variable creation.

The project is assisted in its efforts by the NLS Technical Review Committee. Meeting twice each year, committee members provide recommendations regarding questionnaire design, additional survey topics, potential research uses, methodological issues, data distribution, and user services. The committee is multidisciplinary, reflecting the wide range of social scientists utilizing NLS data.

Ultimate responsibility rests with BLS for overseeing all aspects of the work undertaken by other organizations. For more information about the administration of the NLS program, contact:

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1.3 NLSY97 Sample

The design of the NLSY97 sample allows researchers to analyze the experiences both of the population as a whole and also of minority groups such as Hispanics and blacks. Chapter 2 of this guide further details the NLSY97 sample design and fielding procedures; a brief overview of the sample composition is provided here. Two subsamples comprise the NLSY97 cohort:

- (1) a cross-sectional sample of 6,748 respondents, which is designed to be representative of people living in the United States during the initial survey round and born between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1984; and
- (2) a supplemental sample of 2,236 respondents, which is designed to oversample Hispanic and black people living in the United States during the initial survey round and born during the same period as the cross-sectional sample.

Table 1 lists the sample size in rounds 1–4 by the subsample, race/ethnicity, and gender of respondents.

1.3 Table 1. NLSY97 Sample Sizes by Subsample, Race/Ethnicity & Gender

	Total sample	Cross-sectional sample					Supplemental Sample			
		Cross-sect. total	Non-black, non-Hisp.	Black, non-Hisp.	Hispanic	Mixed race	Supp. total	Black, non-Hisp.	Hispanic	Mixed race
Round 1										
Male	4599	3459	2413	537	469	40	1140	632	508	—
Female	4385	3289	2252	544	452	41	1096	622	472	2
Total	8984	6748	4665	1081	921	81	2236	1254	980	2
Round 2										
Male	4283	3213	2238	504	433	38	1070	599	471	—
Female	4103	3066	2095	517	417	37	1037	584	451	2
Total	8386	6279	4333	1021	850	75	2107	1183	922	2
Round 3										
Male	4170	3144	2193	490	422	39	1026	572	454	—
Female	4039	3029	2076	503	412	38	1010	568	441	1
Total	8209	6173	4269	993	834	77	2036	1140	895	1
Round 4										
Male	4117	3098	2153	485	423	37	1019	580	439	—
Female	3964	2957	2027	489	402	39	1007	570	435	2
Total	8081	6055	4180	974	825	76	2026	1150	874	2

Note: This table was created using the following variables: CV_SAMPLE_TYPE (R12358.), KEY!RACE_ETHNICITY (R14826.), KEY!SEX (R05363.), and RNI (R25102. and R38297.).

Data hint ➔

The sample type of a respondent is identified in variable CV_SAMPLE_TYPE (R12358.).

Multiple Respondent Households

In the NLSY97 cohort, 8,984 respondents originated from 6,819 unique households. Because the sample design selected all household residents in the appropriate age range, 1,862 households included more than one NLSY97 respondent. Table 2 lists the numbers of respondents living in multiple respondent households during the initial survey round. The most common relationship between multiple respondents living in the same household during the first round was that of sibling. Table 3 provides the subset of respondents living with at least one sibling. The NLSY97 does not contain nationally representative samples of siblings of all ages and living arrangements; users should exercise caution when generalizing from the findings of NLSY97 sibling studies. No spouse pairs are present in the data.

1.3 Table 2. Round 1 Distribution of NLSY97 Respondents by Household Type

	Respondents	Households
1 Respondent	4957	4957
Total Multiple Respondents	4027	1862
2 Respondents	3192	1596
3 Respondents	705	235
4 Respondents	100	25
5 Respondents	30	6
Total	8984	6819

1.3 Table 3. Round 1 Distribution of NLSY97 Sibling Groups

Type	Respondents
No Siblings	5129
Total Multiple Siblings	3855
2 Siblings	3134
3 Siblings	627
4 Siblings	84
5 Siblings	10
Total	8984

Notes: Table 2 is based on the household ID code (R11930.) and reports multiple respondent households regardless of the relationship between respondents. Table 3 is based on the household ID code (R11930.) and the relationship variables from the round 1 household roster (HHI2_RELx.xx); it reports multiple respondent households where respondents are siblings. In this table, siblings include biological, adoptive, half-, and step- relationships but not foster relationships.

1.4 Content of the NLSY97

The primary purpose of the NLSY97 is to collect data on youth labor force experiences and investments in education. However, the actual content of the NLSY97 is much broader due to the interests of other governmental agencies besides BLS. The following agencies have funded special sets of questions:

- (1) The departments of Defense and Labor jointly sponsored the round 1 administration of the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)*, a military enlistment test, and the *Interest-Finder (I-F)*, an occupational interest inventory, to the NLSY97 respondents. See section 4.1.2, “Administration of the *CAT-ASVAB*,” for further details. These data will be available on the round 4 Event History CD-ROM.
- (2) The National School-to-Work Office, a joint agency of the departments of Education and Labor, funded the 1996 school survey. This survey, which collected information from all high schools with a 12th grade in the 147 NLSY97 primary sampling units, recorded the characteristics of each school and its staff. See section 4.2.5, “School & Transcript Surveys,” for details and availability information.
- (3) The Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, sponsors the set of questions on crime and criminal activities found in the self-administered portion of the *Youth Questionnaire*. These questions are described in section 4.5.5, “Crime, Delinquency & Arrest.”
- (4) The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) provides funding for various questions in the self-administered portion of the *Youth Questionnaire*.

The wide range of employment, education, and background information in the NLSY97 has been gathered in several different survey instruments. Briefly, the *Screeners*, *Household Roster*, and *Nonresident Roster Questionnaire* identified youths eligible for the survey and collected demographic information on household occupants and key nonresident relatives during the initial survey round. The *Youth Questionnaire*, administered each round, asks the youth about a number of topics, including employment, schooling, family background, health, and attitudes and behaviors. The round 1 *Parent Questionnaire*

interviewed one of the youth's parents about the youth's history and status and about key aspects of the parent's own life. School and transcript surveys collected information in several rounds about schools in the NLSY97 sample areas and the academic records of NLSY97 respondents. The administration of the computer adaptive form of the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery* during round 1 to most NLSY97 respondents will provide researchers with a common aptitude score when the data are publicly available. Finally, in rounds 2–4, data about family income were collected from one of the respondent's parents using the *Household Income Update*. The contents of these survey instruments are described in the following paragraphs.

Screener, Household Roster, and Nonresident Roster Questionnaire

This instrument was initially administered to a member of each household selected for sampling in the NLSY97 survey areas. It was completed by a household resident age 18 or older, referred to as the household informant. This questionnaire was used to identify youths potentially eligible for the NLSY97 survey and/or the administration of the computer adaptive version of the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (CAT-ASVAB)*, a military enlistment test (see section 4.1.2 for more information). In general, eligibility for either group was dependent on the youth's age and, in some sample areas, on the youth's race or ethnicity. Section 2.1, "Sample Design & Screening Process," provides more detailed information about the precise age and race/ethnicity requirements. This instrument actually comprised four sections: the simple screener, extended screener, household roster, and nonresident roster, administered in that order and described below. Question names for the simple and extended screeners begin with "SE," household roster questions begin with "SH," and nonresident roster questions begin with "SN."

The simple screener section was first administered at each household in the sample areas to identify potentially eligible sample members. The simple screener collected the name and birth date or age of each person who could be linked to the household (see section 2.1, "Sample Design & Screening Process," for more information). If the household contained a youth potentially eligible for the NLSY97 or the administration of the *CAT-ASVAB*, the household informant completed the extended screener. This section collected the gender and race/ethnicity of each person in the household and the grade in school the potentially eligible youth was currently attending, if any. Race and ethnicity were used in supplemental sample areas as further criteria for NLSY97 eligibility; in certain cases grade in school affected eligibility for the administration of the *CAT-ASVAB*. If the household contained a youth eligible only for the administration of the *CAT-ASVAB*, the interviewer solicited his or her participation. If the household included one or more youths potentially eligible for the NLSY97, the interview continued with an extensive two-part roster.

The household informant first answered the questions in the household roster section of the *Screener, Household Roster, and Nonresident Roster Questionnaire*. This section established the relationships between household occupants and collected basic demographic information (e.g., marital status, highest grade of schooling completed, employment status) for all household members, including any NLSY97-eligible youths. After the roster was created, one parent of the sample youth was chosen from the list of household occupants and asked to participate in the *Parent Questionnaire* (see “Choice of Parent” in section 2.2, “Interview Methods,” for a description of this process). Finally, the household informant was administered the nonresident roster section, which gathered data on members of the youth’s immediate family (e.g., biological, adoptive, or stepparents; biological or adoptive siblings; spouse; biological children; parent of the youth’s biological children) who lived elsewhere at the survey date.

Youth Questionnaire

In each survey round, the *Youth Questionnaire* is administered to every respondent. This instrument focuses in detail on the youth’s schooling and employment activities; the hour-long interview also collects extensive data on the respondent’s family background, social behavior, and health status. Table 1 lists the name given to each of the major sections included in the *Youth Questionnaire* and provides a brief, general description of the kinds of information collected in each section. The abbreviations for each section are incorporated into the question names for this survey; they are included here for reference.

1.4 Table 1. Content of the Youth Questionnaire

Section		Description of Data Collected
Information	YINF	In rd. 1, verified youth data in the <i> Screener, Household Roster, and Nonresident Roster Questionnaire</i> .
Household Information	YHHI	Confirms and updates information on members of the youth's household after rd. 1.
CPS	YCPS	In rds. 1 and 4, established employment status using questions from the Current Population Survey.
Schooling	YSCH	Gathers information about current schooling and school environment.
Peers/Opportunity Sets	YPRS	In rd. 1, provided the youth with a list of activities and asked him or her to estimate the percentage of peers who participate in each.
Time Use	YTIM	In rds. 1–3, asks the youth about time spent during the day and week on various activities.
Employment	YEMP	Collects data about each employer for whom the youth worked since age 14; also includes data on freelance employment.
Training	YTRN	Asks about training programs the youth has participated in outside of regular schooling.
Health	YHEA	Asks about general state of youth's health and long-standing problems he or she has.
Self-Administered	YSAQ	Completed by youth; asks sensitive questions. Subsections include household and neighborhood environment, relationship with parents, puberty, dating and sexual activity, pregnancy and abortion, attitudes toward self, substance use, and criminal and delinquent activities.
Marriage	YMAR	Asks questions about any marriages or marriage-like relationships that the youth may have had.
Fertility	YFER	Gathers information about any biological children of the youth and the parentage of each.
Program Participation	YPRG	Gathers data about any assistance programs in which the youth and the youth's spouse/partner may have participated.
Income / Assets	YINC/ YAST	Collects data on the income and assets of youth and the youth's spouse/partner. These questions were combined in the YINC section in rd. 1 but split into two sections for subsequent rounds.
Expectations	YEXP	In rds. 1 and 4, asked youths to predict characteristics of their lives at certain points in the future.
PIAT Math	YPIA	Administers the <i>PIAT Math Assessment</i> to eligible respondents.

Parent Questionnaire (round 1)

The *Parent Questionnaire* collected extensive background information from one of the youth's biological parents. If no biological parent lived in the respondent's primary household, another adult household member was selected for the *Parent Questionnaire* according to predetermined criteria (see "Choice of Parent" in section 2.2, "Interview Methods," for a detailed description of this process). In the *Parent Questionnaire*, the resident adult was asked to provide information about his or her activities and the activities of the NLSY97 youth. General questions also determined the family's nationality, religious orientation, and community environment. The names and abbreviations given in Table 2 refer to the major sections included in the round 1 *Parent Questionnaire*. This table also includes a brief, general description of the subsets of questions asked within each major section.

1.4 Table 2. Content of the *Parent Questionnaire*

Section		Description of Data Collected
Information	PINF	Verified own and youth's data collected in the <i>Screener, Household Roster, and Nonresident Roster Questionnaire</i> .
Family Background	P2	Gathered data about parents' family background (e.g., birthplace, siblings).
Calendars	P3	Collected dates of significant events in parent's life (e.g., marital history, employment history).
Parent Health	P4	Gathered information about the general state of the parents' health (e.g., long-term problems).
Income and Assets	P5	Asked about 1996 earnings of all household members and other parental income and assets.
Self-Administered	P6	Parent answered questions about self-esteem, religion, health, behavior/beliefs, and spouse or partner relations.
Child Calendar	PC8	Gathered data about each eligible youth in the household regarding places lived, school history, paternity, adoption or custody, poverty, and child care.
Child Health	PC9	Collected data about the health and health insurance of each eligible youth.
Child Income	PC10	Inquired about the 1996 financial support and earnings of each eligible youth.
Expectations	PC11	Asked parent to make predictions about each eligible youth's life in the next year and at age 20 and 30.
Family	PC12	Collected data about the family situation by asking questions about the youth's social skills, decision-making, positive behavior, and relationships with parents.

School and Transcript Surveys

Designed with an emphasis on the school-to-work transition, the NLSY97 also gathered information from two school surveys conducted by mail with telephone follow-up. In the winters of 1996–97 and 2000–01, all high schools with a 12th grade in the 147 NLSY97 primary sampling units were asked to participate. The 2000 sample also included vocational schools. Participating school administrators provided detailed data on the characteristics of the school, the staff, and the student body. Additional information included the school's general practices, graduation policies, and school-to-work programs. Due to confidentiality restrictions, access to these data is limited; interested researchers should contact BLS at NLS_Info@bls.gov for more information.

The NLSY97 program has also collected specific educational information about respondents directly from their high schools. In winter 1999–2000, the NLSY97 transcript survey sought high school transcripts for all respondents who either had graduated from high school or were age 18 or older and no longer enrolled in high school. Transcripts were received for 1,417 respondents. Based on these transcripts, survey staff constructed a series of variables describing each respondent's high school experience. Public use data will be available on the round 4 Event History CD-ROM.

Administration of the CAT-ASVAB

The Department of Defense (DOD) used the NLSY97 sample as part of a larger effort to establish new norms for the computer adaptive form of the *Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (CAT-ASVAB)*, a military enlistment test. The scores from this group will also be instrumental in creating norms for the

DOD *Interest-Finder (I-F)*, an occupational interest inventory. Administered from summer 1997 to spring 1998, the *CAT-ASVAB* and *I-F* collected baseline information on the aptitudes and vocational interests of NLSY97 respondents. Additionally, the *CAT-ASVAB* and *Interest-Finder* were administered to a group of participants age 17–23 who were sampled at the same time as NLSY97 respondents (see section 4.1.2, “Administration of the *CAT-ASVAB*,” for more information). A number of *ASVAB* variables are included on the round 4 CD; section 4.1.2 contains details about the types of information currently available and the additional variables planned for future release.

Household Income Update

Beginning in round 2, the *Household Income Update* gathers basic income information concerning the respondent’s parent and his or her spouse/partner in the absence of a detailed parent questionnaire. If the youth respondent lives with a parent, this questionnaire collects the parent’s total pre-tax income from wages, salaries, commissions, and tips during the past calendar year; the same data for the parent’s spouse or partner; and the total pre-tax amount of any other income (i.e., farm or business income, inheritances, child support, government programs) received by the parent and spouse/partner together. These data are collected for the respondent’s current household regardless of his or her residence during the past calendar year. Question names for the variables based on the *Household Income Update* begin with “HIU.”

1.5 NLSY97 Data on CD-ROM

NLSY97 data are available to the public on CD-ROM at a charge of \$20. Each CD-ROM contains the data record of each youth, including information from the *Youth Questionnaire*, the *Parent Questionnaire*, and the *Screener, Household Roster, and Nonresident Roster Questionnaire*. Geocode files containing detailed geographic information are also available. Table 1 presents brief descriptions of these NLSY97 data files. Subsequent data releases will be announced in *NLS News*, the quarterly NLS newsletter.

1.5 Table 1. Data Releases

CD-ROMs	Content
NLSY97 Main File	The record of each youth includes information from the <i>Youth Questionnaire</i> ; the round 1 <i>Screener, Household Roster, and Nonresident Roster Questionnaire</i> ; the round 1 <i>Parent Questionnaire</i> ; and the rounds 2–4 <i>Household Income Update</i> .
NLSY97 Geocode File	Information on the geographic area of the youth's current residence and select environmental variables is available to persons satisfactorily completing BLS's geocode accessing agreement procedure. This CD-ROM also includes all main file variables.
NLSY97 Event History File	The event history variables provide information on the youth's education, employment, marriages, and program participation in a status array format. This CD-ROM also includes all main file variables.

1.6 Organization of This Guide

The *NLSY97 User's Guide* is designed for researchers who are either working or planning to work with the NLSY97 data. Users interested in a general overview of NLS cohorts should refer to the *NLS Handbook*. The remainder of this guide is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 presents a description of the procedures used to select the cohort members and the interview methods used during each survey round. This chapter also provides information about the size and composition of the sample, attrition after round 1, and the creation and use of sampling weights.

Chapter 3 describes the various survey instruments, types of variables, and available documentation, as well as the search options included on the CD-ROM.

Chapter 4, the topical portion of this guide, presents summary discussions of sets of variables. Each section details the NLSY97 variables and refers the user to the portion of the survey containing questions in the topical area, as well as to other related supporting documentation. The user is also directed to related sections within this guide and to the relevant areas of interest on the CD-ROM. The table of contents lists the topics and corresponding subtopics found in this chapter. The topical discussions are arranged alphabetically by topic (e.g., "Employment," then "Event History"); the subtopics are also in alphabetical order (e.g., "Fringe Benefits," then "Gaps in Employment") within each topic. Persons interested in reviewing, for example, variables containing data on a respondent's rate of pay should turn to the "Employment" section and examine the subtopic "Wages."

Appendices make up the final section of this guide. The first, a quick reference guide, includes a list and description of NLS documentation; details concerning the NLSY97 CD-ROM; an index to created variables, roster items, and symbols; and contact information for assistance in using the data. The second appendix is a glossary of NLSY97 terms and their definitions.

Throughout the guide, the sections may include “user notes,” which contain important information about some characteristic of the surveys or data file, and “data hints,” which direct researchers to a particular variable or variables that should be used for a specific function. These boxed paragraphs are valuable sources of advice about idiosyncratic aspects of the data set.

